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10. — *The Life of Cardinal Mezzofanti; with an Introductory Memoir of Eminent Linguists, Ancient and Modern.* By C. W. RUSSELL, D.D., President of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. London: Longman, Brown, & Co. 1858. 8vo. pp. xiv. and 502.

THIS memoir, as we learn from the Preface, owes its origin to an article upon Cardinal Mezzofanti printed in the number of the Edinburgh Review for January, 1855. Encouraged by the favor with which that article was received, and by the offer of additional information from various sources, Dr. Russell determined to expand his essay into a volume, and thus to complete the portrait which he had sketched in outline. In the execution of this design he has been entirely successful; and the result is a *Li'e* of the great linguist which fully and fairly exhibits the nature and extent of his attainments. It is deficient, indeed, in those personal details and anecdotes which constitute the highest charm of a biography; but unfortunately it did not fall within the author's design to exhibit the Cardinal in this light. "The true purpose of this narrative," he says,—"to exhibit the faculty rather than the man,—seems to me to depend less on the accumulation of piquant anecdotes and striking adventures, than upon a calm and truthful survey of his intellectual attainments in the successive stages of his career." In this respect nothing more can be desired. Dr. Russell's materials have been drawn from the most remote quarters of the globe, as well as from his own recollections; and he has apparently exhausted every accessible source of information. Cardinal Wiseman furnished him with much material originally designed to be used in that prelate's "Recollections of the Last Four Popes," and contributions were also received from Mezzofanti's nephew. In the arrangement of these materials, Dr. Russell has shown excellent judgment, and though he is not free from that tendency to exaggerate the knowledge and virtues of his hero which is the pet sin of biographers, his volume furnishes all necessary materials for forming a just and impartial estimate of the value of Mezzofanti's attainments.

Born at Bologna on the 17th of September, 1774, and dying at Rome on the 15th of March, 1849, Cardinal Mezzofanti never passed beyond the confines of Italy; yet he was unquestionably the greatest linguist that has ever lived, and, as Lord Byron said, he might have been universal interpreter at the building of the tower of Babel. In regard to the number of languages with which he was acquainted, and the degree of his familiarity with each, there is considerable uncertainty. Dr. Russell has investigated the subject with much thorough-

ness and impartiality, and the result of his investigations may be briefly stated as follows ; — that Mezzofanti spoke “with rare excellence” thirty languages, that he is said to have spoken “fluently” nine more, that he spoke “rarely and less perfectly” eleven, and “imperfectly” eight others, and that he had “studied from books, but is not known to have spoken” fourteen more, making in all seventy-two languages ; and that in addition to these he was more or less familiar with upwards of thirty minor dialects. This number seems almost incredible ; yet the evidence upon which Dr. Russell makes up his statement cannot be easily overthrown, and, after a careful consideration of the subject, we are not inclined to deduct much from the number specified. We cannot, however, concur with him in the opinion which he expresses in regard to Mezzofanti’s acquaintance with general literature and other subjects not immediately dependent upon his knowledge of languages. It is clear that the Cardinal was a wonderful word-machine ; and this appears to have been his chief, if not his only, claim to distinction. Except in the remarkable facility with which he mastered the difficulties of foreign tongues, he does not seem to have possessed much intellectual power. It is evident that his knowledge so far as it was tested was superficial, — “the kind of knowledge,” as has been well said, “which passes current in society, and which is necessarily picked up by one who meets often with cultivated people of different countries.” Nor did he ever write or print anything which could justify a claim to literary eminence. Dr. Russell admits that his sermons were commonplace ; and it is certain that his letters have little merit as compositions. As a theologian, his reputation was low ; and Bunsen, who knew him personally, says he had no idea of Hebrew criticism, and that “his knowledge of Greek criticism, too, was very shallow.” “He remembered words and their sounds and significations almost instinctively,” says this eminent scholar ; “but he lived upon reminiscences : he never had an original thought.” His personal character was blameless, and he seems to have borne his honors and his great reputation with becoming modesty. His charities were numerous and unobtrusive ; and he was always ready to extend a helping hand to young students, particularly to those of the Propaganda. There he passed much of his time in his latter years, in familiar conversation with students from different countries.

Dr. Russell has prefixed to his memoir an introductory essay of about a hundred and twenty pages, comprising notices of the most celebrated linguists of ancient and modern times, exhibiting much curious information and great research, showing that the biography of a great linguist must be to him a labor of love. We ought to add, that

the volume is printed in a shamefully careless manner. Typographical blunders are provokingly frequent, and one is tempted to doubt whether the proofs were ever read.

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11. — *The Laws of Business for Business Men, in all the States of the Union. With Forms for Mercantile Instruments, Deeds, Leases, Wills, &c.* By THEOPHILUS PARSONS, LL.D., Professor of Law in the University at Cambridge. Compiled by the Author principally from his Treatises on the Law of Contracts and on the Elements of Commercial Law. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co. 1857. 8vo. pp. 504.

THE value of all such treatises as this must depend, not only upon the perfect familiarity of the writer with his subject, but also upon his ability to communicate his knowledge of it at once in a systematic form and in simple language. Tried by these tests, Mr. Parsons's volume must take high rank among the numerous works designed to popularize science. The practical knowledge of commercial law which he acquired while he was at the bar, and his reputation as a lawyer and a teacher, are a sufficient guaranty for the soundness of the principles which he lays down, and for the accuracy of his statements. The volume is divided into twenty-eight chapters, and most of these are subdivided into sections, treating severally of the minor divisions of his subject. His first two chapters are devoted to an explanation of the purpose and plan of the book, and to some remarks upon the general subject of commercial law, with definitions of the technical phrases of most frequent occurrence. Following these are chapters upon mercantile contracts, the statute of frauds, negotiable paper, the carriage of goods, the statute of limitations, the laws of bankruptcy and insolvency, the law of shipping, marine, fire, and life insurance, deeds, mortgages, leases, and other kindred topics. The Appendix contains numerous forms for contracts, deeds, leases, and other instruments; and the value of the work is still further enhanced by a very excellent and copious Index. We think that Mr. Parsons would have rendered his work still better adapted to its purpose by chapters upon the laws affecting trustees and property held in trust, and upon the revenue laws. They need not have added much to the size or cost of the work, and there are many points connected with these laws which are not generally understood. With this exception we have not observed any important omissions.